



**STATE OF ARKANSAS
ASA HUTCHINSON, GOVERNOR**

Arkansas Women's Commission
Chair: Alison Williams, Chief of Staff to the Governor
Meeting #4 Arkansas State Capitol
May 13, 2022

Attendees In Person: Mellie Bridewell, Dr. Charisse Childers, Beverly Morrow
Lillie Edwards, Demetria Edwards, Mayor Tomkea Edwards, Mary Ashley Harper, Dorissa
Kaufman, Eleen Talavera, Dominique Toney, Kerri Williams

Virtual Attendees: Dr. Cherisse Jones-Branch, Tamika Edwards, Erica Ingram, Amanda
Kullenkuler, Mila, Heather Larkin, Kathy White Loyd, Apprilla Porch, Kathy Webb, Craig
Wilson, Alison Williams

Absent: Gayatri Agnew, Todd Shields, Naija White

MINUTES

- The Chair called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.
 - The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming the Commissioners and Visitors and mentioning that meetings are open to the public and live streamed on YouTube and archived on our website.
 - The Chair reminded the commissioners that they should have received a copy of the draft minutes of the meeting from April 19th, 2022 and asked for a motion to accept those minutes into the record.
 - Tamika Edwards made the motion and Dr. Cherisse Jones-Branch seconded.
1. Subcommittee reports
- Research and Writing Committee – Dr. Cherisse Jones-Branch
 - Dr. Shields extends his regrets for his absence. He is involved in commencement activities.
 - Since the last meeting the Research and Writing committee has put together a data committee. That data committee has met twice.
 - All the census data has been downloaded to replicate and update the report that the Women's Foundation did in 2018.
 - They have reached out to people at UALR who helped complete the previous report and they are helping to make sure

we define the variables accurately and make “apples to apples” comparisons.

- After Commencement, will replicate and update the tables, one table each week. Will be sharing the updated committees with the committee.
- Hoping to have the tables and maps from the previous replicated and updated by the end of June or early July.
- Barriers to Entry and Retention – Dr. Kathy White Lloyd
 - Trying to gather as much information as possible in the areas they have been given.
 - Had representation from the committee at a recent event. The Arkansas Minority and Women Owned Business Event Entrepreneurs. This was a good event. Dr. White Lloyd is planning to write up.
 - Can have some of those speakers if we wanted to have a whole commission meeting or expand to the full committee.
 - Some of our committee members sat with some women in STEM. Would like to have them address some of the barriers and some of the opportunities within the STEM profession.
 - Kathy Webb shared about the new college hunger summit. Many of the students happened to be from Arkansas State University, Mountain Home which is our next site.
 - As a possible speaker to our commission, a single mother working in a pandemic and her story was compelling.
 - Continuing to work as a committee on the things that we want addressed in Mountain Home.
 - Single Mothers
 - Rural Barriers and Opportunities for Remote Work.
 - Will write up some of the detailed information that the committee has shared about the workshops and about some of the articles that has recently been in the New York Times about women in the pandemic.
- Impacts of Covid-19 - Mellie Bridewell
 - Scheduled meetings every Monday at 2:00.
 - Working in the next week or two on getting the Research and Writing Sub-Committee together to help determine where their mindset is and what we really need to be focusing on.
 - Noticed that there is an overlap and gap and where do we start and stop. Since Covid was hitting on all of these different subcommittees. Would like to make sure they are honing in.
 - Thinking about bringing in, as we meet in these weekly meetings, may even go to bi-weekly meetings. Would like to bring in speakers at the federal level as well as the state level, of speakers that can come in and give us those stories but also

data and information. There are some researchers out there that are doing some really good work around this so bringing in UAMS, and Minority Health Commission.

- Since Covid was such an impact on everything, homing in on how we structure, and figure out where we start and stop.
- We have a great committee really involved and meeting weekly.
- Chair brought out that we were barreling to December 1st, when our report is due to the Governor and Legislature, sensing that there is some unwariness about how to bring this all together. The chair appreciates Mellie continuing to talk to the other committees, the research and writing committee.
- Chair wanted to make sure that the commissioners remember that Mellie had offered to share a template about how to bring this research into a more structured fashion to go to the Research and Writing Committee, for them to include it in the final report. We are working on getting that template finalized. It is not a requirement that the committee use it, but we are hopeful that it will be the kind of thing that can be used to deconflict or cross reference where there is work going on in the various committees.
- Chair wanted to make sure that everyone knew she hears the stress about it and she is working hard to make it easier. Noting that this is the period where we will really be going to be getting to the “messiness” of all of the information. Confident that we are going to pull the report together beautifully.
- Family Caregiving- Heather Larkin/Gayatri Agnew
 - Chair asked that Heather Larkin provide the report.
 - The committee on Family Caregiving is meeting on Friday.
 - Report at last meeting from Tony Williams at the Division of Child Care at DHS.
 - We are gathering information on our survey questions and moving forward.
- Commission has conducted 3 working sessions.
- Scope and focus of the subcommittee.
 - 80% on the childcare economy in Arkansas
 - History
 - Current State
 - Availability (quality, cost and geographical), business model(s), workforce challenges.
 - 20% on other care needed and its impact on women’s labor force participation.
- In the past two months have had 4 guests to come and speak to our committee.
- Reviewing the findings of the early learning task force looking specifically at supply and demand and at availability through a lens of quality.
 - Emerging key issues
 - Lack of availability of care for infants and toddlers.
 - Lack of high-quality care almost across the entire state.

- Workforce shortages and challenges (with several programs including the expansion of the T.E.A.C.H. program which has already been funded with covid relief money).
- Chair mentioned in the last meeting that an invitation was extended to Governor Miki Bowman of The Federal Reserve, to talk about The Federal Reserve's work around Labor Force Participation. Senator Breanne Davis has invited her to attend the August meeting in Russellville. We are very excited that she will be in person.
- The Chair has made progress on locking down a location for the regional meeting in Southwest Arkansas. This will likely be our October 17th meeting. Spoken with Sheryl Edwards, thank you to Senator Elliott for making that connection. Sheryl Edwards is the Assistant to the President and Director of Government Relations at South Arkansas University. Will have an update for us later.
- Later this month The Chair will be speaking with representatives from the Forte Foundation out of Austin. In internet research there was a struggle to find male as allies affinity groups. This one seemed to be the most organized and intentional. Hoping to talk to them and get a little more information about how they organize their males as allies' group.
- The Chair noted that there was still some difficulty in engaging the military community. Talked with the Chief of Staff at Veterans Affairs, she is a former officer. Having challenges getting to the folks that have been referred to her but continuing to work that transient community also, wanting to make sure we are taking them into account. If anyone has any additional recommendations or ideas of ones that we can reach out to as potential host or special guest, please let her know.
- The Chair refereed to Dr. Loyd mentioning looking at other potential speakers for the full commission meetings. The Chair said that she is happy to look at other potential speakers for the full commission, and always welcomes that special guest are invited to the sub-committee meetings.
- The Chair paused for any questions from the commissioners before we move on.
- The Chair turned the remainder of the meeting over to Commissioner Mellie Bridewell to mediate.
 - Introduction of Mellie Bridewell
 - Reminded that the meeting has a hard stop at 2:30 and that The Chair would be breaking in about 60 seconds before that time is reached.
- Mellie Bridewell had everyone go around the room and introduce themselves to those that are on Zoom.
- Focus Group
 - Mellie Bridewell asked about what the biggest barriers the women have faced in reference to business, career, and finances.
 - Unable to find people to work in the rural area. Those with the education do not stay in the area.
 - Transportation/Lack of public transportation.
 - Daycare
 - Hours 8-5
 - No weekends

- Availability/not enough facilities so long waiting list.
- Cost
- Daycares should have a segregated room for children who may be running a little bit of a fever but not sick. These parents are having to leave work for teething, or allergies.
- Education
 - Lack of candidates
 - Not knowing exactly what businesses need.
 - Partnerships with local businesses in surrounding areas. This will ensure that when students are graduating or looking for jobs their skill set is matching the needs.
 - Need education on financial literacy (state required)
 - Knowing about programs available to them so they can become educated.
 - Starting earlier on educational level
- Parental Involvement
 - Parental trust of organizations so that they can work in harmony with them.
 - Parents are working more than one job, so they don't have the availability to make it to the schools.
- Barriers for women and girls that male counterparts aren't facing.
 - In Arkansas males are hired faster than their female counterparts.
 - Jobs are harder in southeast Arkansas.
 - Farm jobs do not hire females.
- Mental Health
 - Pandemic exposed new issues that were not seen before.
 - Students that were virtual coming back to school are having panic attacks because of socialization issues.
 - Virtual students having a hard time acclimating back to in person school.
 - Staff is struggling to adjust.
 - Education for school staff so that they know how to identify mental health issues and know how to help.
 - Employee Assistant Programs should be offered.
 - Health providers providing education to parents on mental health.
 - Changing the stigmatism surrounded around mental illness.
 - Counselors are not able to counsel because of their work loads.
 - Training for legal personnel.

- Mental Health first aid.
- Safety and Security Issues
 - Rural vs. Metropolitan areas shelters are needed and resources for facilities where women can go with children.
 - Community gardens and education around healthy food choices.
 - Rural Arkansas mothers need support. Having a baby in Southeast Arkansas is hard.
 - USDA providing services.
 - Arkansas extension services
 - Will follow up with Jill Floyd
- Policies and Practices in Arkansas that our government can use to address these barriers.
 - In the schools funding for a mental health worker. State to provide the funding.
 - Collegiate required mental health course for educators.
 - Counselors need to get back to being able to counsel students.
 - Virtual options for mental health.
 - Legislatures have asked the partnership to demonstrate what a Mental Health first aid class would look like.
 - Technology Sites around the state that will allow people to come and receive the mental health services. These sites should be available in the schools along with the community.
 - Options for mothers and fathers to have paid leave to attend functions at school. Have policy in place that gives parents that options.
 - Legislation around Garrett's Law removing kids from hospitals for mothers that test positive. A policy connecting mental health with drug counseling and the removal of children for child welfare. Not just the hospital level but once the child is in the foster care system.
- Mellie asked if there were any other Commissioners that have any questions.
 - Dr. Jones-Branch asked if the guest that has a child that suffers from asthma has an environmental concern.
 - Because the child suffers year-round, maybe the asthma condition would be a little bit better.
 - Environment pollution is a concern in Southeast Arkansas. They are unsure about the long term affects of the chemicals used to spray crops.
 - Kathy Webb shared her email address so that participants can email her about the food deserts and healthier food.
 - Dr. Childers asked that someone from the association that represents Family Consumer

Science Teachers on that commission, so that the message can be distributed accordingly so it can be supported around the state in all the schools.

- The Chair thanked the in-person guests and thanked them for their feedback and recommendations. The Chair then asked Mellie to introduce her special guests.
- Mellie then introduced Mr. Craig Wilson, Director of Health Policy from The Arkansas Center for Health Improvement.
 - Mr. Wilson presented a PowerPoint presentation about the health impact.
- Mellie then introduced Kerri Williams the District Administrator for the Watson Chapel School District.
 - Kerri Williams talked about the school shooting that resulted in the death of a student.
 - When discussing what the students needed Mental Health Issues were the main issue.
 - The staff was offered mental health training.
 - Anonymous check in form was developed.
 - 18 forms resulted in a crisis rating which meant immediate transfer to a facility.
 - Staff assigned based on the need of the student.
- The Chair asked if Mellie had any closing remarks.
 - Mellie thanked her guest for driving two hours to make the meeting.
- The Chair thanks our presenters and everyone who participated in the meeting. The next meeting will be in Mountain Home on June 16th, 2022, with Dr. White Loyd hosting.
- The Chair adjourned the meeting at 2:31 pm.

